

Sunday: Day of Thanksgiving

Date: November 26, 2020

Text: Philippians 4:6-20

Title: “do not be anxious”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me.

On this Day of Thanksgiving, our Gospel reading focuses on the thankfulness or the apparent lack thereof of men who were healed of a disease, or condition, that made them unable to live in their communities as ordinary citizens. Leprosy was a disease that forced people to isolate from healthy people. You were forced to live outside the city, usually in squalid conditions, with others suffering from the same malady. Every day was a source of anxiety for these individuals. Where would their next meal come from? How was their family coping with their separation? When will I be able to see them? Questions without ready answers. These people were dependent on the mercy of others to survive from one day to the next.

As they encounter Jesus, these ten men have their anxiety abated. They were healed by the only Son of the Father and sent to do what was necessary to re-enter daily living in their families. For one of the ten, a Samaritan, his faith restored to him something more than his ability to return to normal life. His faith made him well. Faith in Jesus, resulted in the healing of his leprosy, and the healing of his sin sick heart. He was given faith in Christ that would alleviate his anxiety about his condition and his future. He no longer had a reason to be anxious.

“do not be anxious”

Our Epistle reading for this Day of Thanksgiving begins with Paul’s call to the Christians at Philippi to not be anxious about anything. In our world today, these are words that many a health professional would like us to live by. Anxiety is the cause of many changes in body physiology and often causes physical health to deteriorate. When we are startled or challenged abruptly by an event, our adrenaline begins to flow, our heart rate and breathing increases. We begin losing our ability to think clearly. As the risks increase, we have a fight or flight response, and blood flow to our extremities is reduced as it moves to our core. All the chemicals released in our bodies to combat the current situation are detrimental to our long-term health if they persist.

If the event is not sudden, stress effects are less noticeable but no less harmful to the body. When we are concerned about work, family, health conditions for ourselves or loved ones, or financial matters, we don't notice the dramatic shifts in the way we feel, but the harmful effects of stress are there. Medical professionals have linked stress to many illnesses and conditions over the years. Cancer, dementia, Alzheimer's, diabetes, heart disease, strokes and the like are often linked to stress in our lives, either in their onset, or in their exacerbation.

Paul was no stranger to stress. As he carried the gospel message of Christ's atoning sacrifice for the salvation of all mankind to the Gentile world, he endured sudden physical confrontation, as well as the stress of constant travel, hatred, and imprisonment. As Paul writes to the Philippians, he is sharing with them the peace that he has found throughout his years of missionary service. Writing from prison in Rome, the letter to the Philippians thanks them for their support for his ministry in Macedonia, Thessalonica, and throughout the Roman Empire. Our text today is Paul's concluding remarks to the church who loved him, supported him, and prayed for him.

“do not be anxious”

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:11 that he has learned to be content in whatever situation he finds himself in. Whether it be physical abuse at the hands of opponents to the Gospel or being shipwrecked on the island of Malta. He has been threatened, beaten, maligned, chased, and imprisoned in his life. He does not dwell on the negative things however. Instead he looks to what God had done for him.

Verses 4-5 of Philippians 4 speak volumes about Paul's ability to live without anxiety. Paul writes,

Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.

It is not mind over matter for Paul. It is not some mystical eastern philosophy that gives him peace of mind. It is the presence of the Lord. It is Christ who visited him on the road to Damascus and who comes to him each time he gathers for worship with the followers of Jesus. It is Yahweh who sends his Holy Spirit to comfort and support him as he reads the Scriptures. It is in God's Word, written and in the flesh, that he is given “peace of God, the peace which surpasses all

understanding, that will guard his heart and mind in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7). In a world that was chasing after a pantheon of gods, Paul found peace in Christ.

In our world today, there are even more gods that people chase after. All the idols of Paul’s day and of ours are helpless in the face of anxious moments. Idols of wood or stone, philosophy or finances are unable to ease anxious responses to challenging events we are faced with. Nowadays, there is much anxiety and worry, hopelessness, suicide and substance abuse. We are surrounded with anger and hostility at our elected officials. We bristle at every new COVID-19 announcement and restriction. We are polarized over the smallest of things and find fault with others when none is intended. Our anxiety grows every day, and it is getting worse.

“do not be anxious” Paul reminds us because the Lord is at hand.

In the midst of this chaotic and uncertain world, the Father has done so much. There is still food on our tables. There is air in our lungs. There is clothing on our backs. Just as he has promised to do for us, He continues to send out his blessings.

While some things may be lacking in our minds and in our hearts, are these things really necessary. Often, we become confused with our needs as opposed to our wants. We have learned in the last few months to get by with less in the face of shortages brought on by hoarding done by anxious people. Even when God removes what we need, it is only for a time. He restores us and gives us all that we need again.

Matthew 6:25-34 comes to mind as Jesus talks about being anxious about our life, what we will eat and what we will drink. Pointing to the flowers of the field and the sparrows of the air. He points to the provision of the Father for care and maintenance of all his creation. Jesus leads us to see that through God we are cared for even when we don’t recognize it. For us we know that through His only Son, the Father has clothed us more gloriously than we can ever dress ourselves. In our baptism, we are clothed with the robe of Christ’s righteousness. As the Holy Spirit began a work of faith in our hearts. In the washing of regeneration, we are invited into the eternal kingdom of our Lord, where all our needs will be met. We will no longer feel the desire for things we do not have.

At the wedding feast of the Lamb, we will be fed with the Food of Immortality. This is a banquet beyond compare. Our greatest celebrations and feasts are a mere shadow of what is to come in the presence of Jesus. This feast begins here on earth

as we share in the very body and blood of our risen savior Jesus. In the Sacrament of the Altar, Jesus gives us himself to eat and to drink, forgiving our sins and assuring us of our salvation. All this he gives to us without our need to toil endlessly, or struggle with anxiety as to whether we have done enough. He gives freely so that we may be at peace, free of anxious moments.

Jesus has done it all for us. He has paid the price for our sins. He has carried our broken human nature to the cross, buried it in the tomb, and risen with a new glorified body. We too shall rise and be like him when he returns in glory to judge the living and the dead.

Through Jesus' sacrifice for us, we see the true love of our Father. We see the Father as he pours his heart out for us. We need not be anxious about anything. God wants to give us all that we need. All we need to do is receive his gifts. As his blessings flow over us, we are surrounded by the peace of God that surpasses all understanding as he guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. In light of this, we are invited by God to leave our anxious hearts behind as we come to him in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving letting our requests be made known to him.

Freed of our anxiety we can turn our hearts to all the blessings God had given us and think about whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable whatever is excellent and whatever is worthy of praise. As we practice these things the God of peace will be with us.

Amen